

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2461

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FOR ARA/CAR AND ARA/MGT

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ALOW, JM

SUBJECT: KINGSTON'S POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCE AND DESTABILIZATION ALLEGATIONS

1. POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCE (10 PERCENT) WAS ESTABLISHED FOR KINGSTON ON APRIL 21, 1976. THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED BY THE WALL STREET JOURNAL AND MADE PUBLIC IN MAY IN FRONT PAGE STORY WHICH GAVE EMPHASIS DESIGNATION KINGSTON AS "HARDSHIP POST" WITH "HARDSHIP ALLOWANCES" FOR USG PERSONNEL. IN MID-AUGUST JAMAICA DAILY NEWS ADVISED EMBASSY IT WOULD BE REPRINTING WALL STREET JOURNAL STORY, AND MADE CLEAR THERE WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE EMBELLISHMENT BASED ON LOCAL RUMORS AND MISCONCEPTIONS. THE DAILY NEWS' REPORTER WHO ADVISED THE EMBASSY OF FOREGOING WAS INVITED IN TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT IN AN EFFORT TO MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE AND SET STRAIGHT THE FACTS. EMBASSY'S ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER ATTEMPTED THIS BY OFFERING FOLLOWING INFORMATION.

A. HARDSHIP POST AND HARDSHIP ALLOWANCE TERMINOLOGY IS INCORRECT. POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCES ARE EXTENDED TO MOST U.S. DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS AS A MEANS OF COMPENSATING FOR DIFFERENCES IN ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE-STYLE BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND THE OVERSEAS POST.

B. ESTABLISHMENT OF POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCE HERE
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HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH STATE OF EMERGENCY, LACK OF

VARIETY IN ENTERTAINMENT, INADEQUATE HOUSING, RESTRICTIONS ON FOOD AND DRINK, AND MOST OTHER FACTORS WHICH NORMALLY ARE THE BASIS OF SUCH ALLOWANCES AND ABOUT WHICH HE WAS QUESTIONED.

C. MOST OTHER POSTS IN THE CARIBBEAN AREA HAVE FOR MANY YEARS HAD SUCH AN ALLOWANCE.

D. ALLOWANCE ESTABLISHED FOR KINGSTON ONLY, NOT THE COUNTRY OF JAMAICA, AND IT IS LOWEST AVAILABLE IN THE ALLOWANCE SCALE.

2. ON AUGUST 17 DAILY NEWS RAN PAGE 2 STORY "JCA SAID A 'HARDSHIP POST' FOR US DIPLOMATS". STORY GAVE EMPHASIS TO HARDSHIP LANGUAGE AND CITED AS FACTORS RESULTING IN ALLOWANCE ALL OF THOSE, AND SOME OTHERS, WHICH ADMIN. OFFICER HAD SPECIFICALLY EXCLUDED AS FACTORS. UPI PICKED UP STORY (APPARENTLY BASED ON ABOVE DAILY NEWS STORY) AND RAN IT THROUGH ITS WIRE-SERVICE WITH FURTHER DISTORTIONS. (VERSION WE HAVE HERE APPEARED IN AUGUST 20 EDITION OF MIAMI HERALD.) JAMAICA DAILY GLENANER RAN THIS STORY SEVERAL DAYS LATER.

3. FOLLOWING THESE STORIES PM MANLEY AND FONMIN THOMPSON HAVE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF "HARDSHIP ALLOWANCE" AND "DESIGNATION JAMAICA AS HARDSHIP POST" APPEARED TO HIM TO BE A "DESTABILIZING ACT". AMBASSADOR IN EACH INSTANCE ATTEMPTED TO LAY TO REST THAT CANARD. SIMILARLY, THROUGH CONVERSATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH KEY OFFICIALS IN BOTH THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO SET RECORD STRAIGHT BY MAKING FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. THERE IS NO "HARDSHIP ALLOWANCE" BUT THERE IS A POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCE PROVIDED TO MOST OF OUR POSTS, WHICH COMPENSATES STAFF FOR DIFFERENCES IN ENVIRONMENT AND LIFESTYLE.

B. THAT FOR KINGSTON WAS ESTABLISHED IN APRIL AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE STATE OF EMERGENCY.

D. IT IS THE LOWEST AVAILABLE WITHIN OUR SYSTEM.

D. THE FACTORS BEHIND ESTABLISHMENT OF THAT ALLOWANCE WERE NOT AS CITED IN VARIOUS NEWS STORIES.

E. THE SAME OR HIGHER ALLOWANCES EXIST FOR ALMOST

ALL OF OUR POSTS IN THE CARIBBEAN.

F. CONTRARY TO NEWS STORIES THE EMBASSY HAS NOT REPEAT HAS NOT ANNOUNCED ESTABLISHMENT OF SUCH AN ALLOWANCE. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUCH ALLOWANCES IS A MATTER OF PUBLIC RECORD. TO THE EXTENT WE HAVE RECEIVED PRESS QUERIES, WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO CLARIFY IN THE ABOVE MANNER WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT. THE PRESS HAS GROSSLY DISTORTED AND MISQUOTED EMBASSY STAFF IN THEIR STORIES.

4. THE ISSUE RECEIVED NEW EMPHASIS WITH AGEE'S VISIT AND THE LATTER'S ALLEGATION THAT DESIGNATION OF A COUNTRY AS A HARDSHIP ASSIGNMENT IS A DESTABILISING TOOL USED BY THE USG.

5. WE HAVE QUIETLY PROVIDED A COMPREHENSIVE BUT UN-OFFICIAL LIST OF POST DIFFERENTIAL CITIES AND COUNTRIES TO THE PM'S OFFICE AND TO THE FONMIN'S OFFICE IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THE CHARACTER OF THE LIST ITSELF IN ADEQUATE EVIDENCE THAT THE ALLOWANCE IS NOT A "DESTABILIZING TOOL".

6. THE MOST RECENT CHAPTER IN THIS SORDID EPISODE IS A HEADLINE STORY IN THE JAMAICA STAR NEWSPAPER ON SEPTEMBER 15 WHICH QUOTES PAO AS STATING THAT THE POST DIFFERENTIAL ALLOWANCE WAS ESTABLISHED BECAUSE OF THE "HIGH COST OF HOUSING, FOOD, ELECTRICITY AND OTHER NECESSARY COMMODITIES". THE STORY GOES ON TO STATE THAT THE US AMBASSADOR HAD EARLIER DESCRIBED KINGSTON AS A HARDSHIP POST "COMPARING THE COUNTRY WITH PLACES SUCH AS VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. HE WAS ALLEGED TO HAVE GIVEN THIS AS THE REASON WHY THE EMBASSY HAD NOT GOT IS FULL STAFF. THE STAR WAS TOLD THAT THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REASON FOR SHORTAGE OF EMBASSY STAFF WAS BECAUSE CONGRESS HAS NOT YET APPROVED THE TRANSFER OF NEW STAFF REPLACEMENTS BUT THAT THEY WOULD HAVE THE FULL COMPLEMENT IN A MONTH OR TWO."

7. PAO DID IN FACT RESPOND TO A QUERY FROM A STAR REPORTER SEVERAL DAYS EARLIER BUT ONLY SUMMARIZED VERSION DESCRIBED PARA 3 ABOVE. HE SAID NOTHING ABOUT HOUSING, FOOD, STAFF SHORTAGES, ETC, NOR HAS THE AMBASSADOR EVER PUBLICLY COMMENTED ABOUT THE ALLOWANCE AND STAFF SHORTAGES. WE ARE UNAWARE OF THE SOURCE OF THESE MISQUOTES AND DISTORTIONS.

8. TEXTS OF THE VARIOUS STORIES CITED ABOVE ARE BEING POUCHED TO ARA/CAR.

9. SHOULD THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVE QUERIES FROM ANY
SOURCE CONCERNING THIS ISSUE, WE HOPE ANY RESPONSES
WILL BE CONSISTENT WITH PARA 3 ABOVE.
GERARD

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